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THE CHRISTIAN OFFICER.

It is a most awakening truth, and one which must be received on the authority of the sacred volume, that in whatever state, morally and spiritually considered, we leave this world, in that very condition we shall remain for ever. The man whom the hour of death finds in the possession, through Divine grace, of real holiness, will be holy for ever; while he who closes this life as he spent it, rejecting God, and slighting the offers of salvation, will continue hardened and impenitent through all eternity. In the former case, never-ceasing happiness will be the consequence; in the latter, misery without an end. Let us connect these considerations with another, which scripture and daily observation combine to press upon our attention—the uncertainty of human life, and the possibility that at any moment, and without any notice, we may be called into this fixed and changeless state of existence; and it would appear impossible not at once to arrive at a proper conclusion as to our own habitual duty as dying creatures, yet possessed of immortal souls. Surely, it must follow that no course of conduct can be safe or right which will not bear the test of eternity applied to it, and of which we cannot feel satisfied that, were eternity to break upon us while actually pursuing it, it would be consistent with that holiness of character which alone will be followed with the happiness of heaven. We should thus continually employ the immediate prospect of eternity as a test by which to ascertain the propriety or the impropriety of *all we do, and think, and say;* by which to judge of the correctness or erroneousness of any doctrine we may be disposed to embrace, and the worth or insufficiency of any of the principles we adopt as our own.

It is by applying this rule to the gospel, as containing the principles of genuine Christianity, that we learn its real value and intrinsic excellence. The doctrines to which it invites attention, and the precepts which it enforces, reduced to practice, necessarily lead the man who is enabled by Divine grace to yield himself to their influence, into a state in which he may not only regard

eternity in near prospect with composure, but await its approach with joy; because it will confirm him in holiness for ever, and secure to him, through the merits of Jesus Christ, an uninterrupted enjoyment of the Divine presence and love. Nowhere do we meet with attestations so strong in favor of scriptural Christianity as those which have been given at the moment when this world has appeared as nothing, and the soul has been absorbed in the future. Then it has been discovered that, however much its truths are questioned by multitudes, and however much the preference denied to these may have given to other systems, nothing—no, nothing—but the religion of Jesus can lead the soul into that state for which death has no terrors, and eternity no alarm.

It was with a view to give such a testimony that a young officer, who fell in the siege of Algiers, sat down on the evening before the engagement, and, in the anticipation of death, wrote three letters, the expressions in which, as far as regarded religion, he wished should be considered by the three individuals to whom they were addressed, as coming from that eternal world into which he had a presentiment he should soon enter. Extracts from two of these letters are subjoined. They were written at a season when a man was not likely to dissemble; when hypocrisy would not guide his pen nor influence his heart. He was just at that age when the world looks attractive, when hope is lively, and the imagination is busy in picturing to itself scenes of future delight. He was young, and his natural disposition was far from gloomy; but, under the influence of real religion, he cheerfully resigned the fancied pleasures which arise from the gaities of this world for those which are alone to be discovered in the heartfelt service of God. There was a time, indeed, when on these points he thought and acted differently. He had ardently engaged in the pursuit of his professional studies—but had neglected the all-important interests of his soul—until, in the providence of God, he became acquainted with a pious medical officer in the navy. His friend resolved, in the opportunities of conversation, to bring the great truths of vital religion before his mind, and, if possible, to excite attention to them.

They first conversed on the state of man, as an accountable and a fallen being—on his inability to render satisfaction to the Divine law, and his consequent exposure to eternal punishment; from hence they were led to contemplate the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ—the wonderful and glorious plan of redemption, and the way of a sinner's pardon, justification, and acceptance with God. Various intervals of leisure were improved for the purpose of religious conference until, under the influence of Divine teaching, the youth began to perceive the excellency of the gospel, and to be alive to his own state as a sinner, and by his humble inquiries, and the eagerness with which he sought information, to prove himself sincerely desirous of an interest in those blessings to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He attended with earnestness to the explanation of saving faith, and of the necessity, nature and evidences of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work in the heart; in prayer, and the means afforded by God for spiritual improvement, he took delight; the Divine precepts he readily received as the rule of a believer's life, and now he experienced the joy of communion with God.

As the consequence of this alteration in his views in favor of personal religion, he manifested a lively solicitude for the spiritual welfare of others. Many letters attest the depth of this anxiety, but there is one sentiment pervading them all—which cannot be better expressed than in his own language, in a letter to a friend:—"Remember, we shall all be lost unless Christ be with us, who says, 'Ye must be born again.' We must remember that God is just, as well as merciful, and that his mercy has only one channel, which is through his Son."

But the time arrived when his principles should be put to the test; when he should feel more deeply than he had ever felt, the value of that Saviour whom the gospel reveals, and His power to sustain in circumstances when the spirit needs more than ordinary support. On the evening previous to the arrival of the fleet off Algiers, he gained a few moments for retirement, and as the sun went down upon him for the last time, he took up his pen and wrote the following letter to a friend:

ETERNITY.

My dear ———

I must date my letter from Eternity, as this will never reach you, unless I am killed in the ensuing fight with the Algerines. But I thank my Creator, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that the terrors of death are taken away by his blessed redemption of poor ruined sinners. Since I left England, having been without the converse of any Christian friend on board, I have been suffering doubts and fears; which, together with some persecution, have brought me very low. Oh, how I long to talk to a dear friend, of "Christ and him crucified!" but, as the apostle has said, "When I am weak, then am I strong." I pray to be, in the strength of my blessed Redeemer, resigned to what he shall think fit to appoint. If it pleaseth him to take me to himself, I hope to say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" I am by this time far removed from the world and all its giddy scenes; my last wish is, that you would love the brethren, whether of high or low estate; here it is I notice some of the oldest Christians to fail. Remember, that to be a Christian is the highest honor man can possess, and "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another."

Oh, what a blessed, indescribable joy, do I feel now in my Justifier before an offended God! Now, in a moment when the worldly boaster trembles, I can stand unappalled, and point with faith to my Redeemer. I wish to manifest my love for all who are servants of Christ. I have left the fashionable, vain world, and, therefore, speak without its ceremonies. I speak, as it were, from that place where "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt." I have this day been reading the book which gave you so much comfort: "The Life of Colonel Gardiner." It requires all my prayers to keep me spiritually minded, amidst blasphemy and sin, and to be looking to Christ for the peace which he alone can give his saints. The H—s is in the fleet; I went on board of her when we called at Gibraltar, and refreshed myself with the conversation of our Lord's servants. Think well of the privileges you enjoy of being amongst them, and conversing with them. I wish all

Christians would love one another; but worldly pride draws the mind from these celestial delights. May the Saviour of mankind send his Holy Spirit on you all!

I am, with sincerest prayers for the welfare of your dear family, Yours, in Christ.

The next letter is addressed to his mother—a son's last, affectionate farewell. Sons will read it as their own language: mothers will feel it addressed to them. The words of a child to a beloved parent are likely to be the utterance of undisguised affection. It is no easy thing for one whose mind is susceptible of every tender emotion, to sit down and tell a mother, "It is probable I shall never see you more." Under such a feeling, the sentiments expressed have a stamp of sincerity. The letter evidently discovers a hurried state of mind—a rapid transition from one subject to another—a hovering of thought between self and the beloved object before the imagination. He utters in this the same expressions of lively confidence as in the preceding letter, with a constant reference to the same truths as the ground of his support; sudden glances at the littleness of this world, and the grandeur of another; at the pains of this life, and the glories of a better. But its principal feature is a tender anxiety, an ardent concern about the eternal interests of his mother and of others dear to him; the pleading eloquence of the heart that strives to prevail, but seems embarrassed by the importance of its subject. He alludes to every truth, and uses every consideration to make them bear on the great object of salvation by Christ alone; while he strives, if possible, to heal the wound and dry the tear which were to be a mother's lot, when he had passed far beyond the boundaries which enclose sorrow and sighing, pain and death.

By the side of such a scene, the cold, unsatisfied indifference of the dying infidel looks inconceivably pitiful—the blasphemy of a dying profligate, indescribably wretched. Contemplating such a spectacle, the believer should be encouraged, remembering that he who imparted to this young officer strength equal to his day, is able to make all grace abound toward him, and enable him to say, as he did, "I die trusting."

ETERNITY.

My dear mother:

I arrived with the fleet in the Mediterranean, and anchored at Gibraltar; but finding no conveyance to Malta, where Captain ——— resides at present, I remained on board this ship. We are off Algiers, and shall attack it immediately. If I do not live to see you any more, you will receive this, as I leave it in my desk for you. It is expected that this will be a most tremendous fight; and the Albion, from her situation, will receive more fire than any other in the squadron. I am stationed on the forecastle, having a gun there under my charge. As this letter will not reach you until I am launched into eternity, know, my dear, dear mother, that I have hope in my Redeemer's sufferings, to be justified before the face of my God. While writing this, I pray that my fall may have the effect of pointing you to Him who only can save; and this He can do to the very uttermost. I should indeed dread to die; but I trust that if I do, I am only sent to sing the sooner the praises of that Redeemer who has sent his grace into my heart.

I have left the things of this for those of another world, where I hope my Saviour will receive me as one of his blessed—blessed with having his precious grace.

May He send this grace into all your hearts, and draw you to himself! Remember that this world is of little consequence to me at this moment. "All is vanity!" Oh, deceive not yourselves, but look to the Redeemer's sufferings for you! If you ask for his grace while on this earth, you shall have it. God coming on this earth to die for such worms! I survey this plan of redemption with wonder, and love Him who died for me. Remember, O, mother, that my last wish is, that you pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit, and for the saving grace of Christ, which alone can make me happy at this time. By the time you receive this, I shall long have been gone, I hope, to heaven Don't grieve for me, for by that time I shall be with the Redeemer; but be concerned for your own souls, which are liable to be required of you each day, each moment. Look that you be ready, if they be required of you. I feel quite re-

signed to all that can happen to me, as I know I am under the direction of a loving Father. My last prayer is, that you may all know Christ, and him crucified. Learn to think yourself a sinner by nature, and that all your charities are as dust before God, unless you have and feel a love to Christ surpassing all other love. If you have not this love, pray earnestly that you may feel it, and that immediately; for see how I am cut off in the prime of youth. If I knew that you had obtained by faith an interest in Christ, I could depart into another world with delight. Oh, embrace Christ, who alone can save! Let these words strike on your hearts with treble force. Read, especially, the New Testament, the Epistle to the Romans, and Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. Know that these things are now what I rest on. Silver and gold are of no consequence to me now: Christ is the only refuge from the wrath to come. Remember, that if by the time you receive this I am in heaven, it is not by mine own works, but through Christ, who was the only one that ever kept the law. He is our justification before the pure throne of heaven. The God that dwells there "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" therefore, He will not behold us except through a blessed Mediator, Christ; to whom we must pray for His blessed Spirit to help us, seeing that our state is by nature sinful. "Except ye be born again" of Christ's Holy Spirit, "ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven!"

Let this shock make you fly to Christ; if so, I willingly die; for I shall soon see you, if you go to Him, in another and a better world. I die trusting. I commend you all again into His hands, who can bless you, until I see you in heaven. We shall meet again, perhaps, very soon.

The view of a fellow-creature in the immediate anticipation of a change of worlds, ought to produce seriousness. It is solemn to gaze on the countenance which thoughts of eternity have marked with awe, and over which death is drawing its paleness. It is equally interesting to watch the mind, and see how the moral features are affected by the contemplation of immortality; how they change at the sight of a world of happi-

ness or a world of misery, and at the approach of the messenger who will inevitably introduce the departing spirit to one or other of these states to dwell for ever there.

In reference to the subject of this brief narrative, it need not be inquired whence this calm, this happy state of mind, this bright prospect of eternity; nothing said about the fears of danger, the pain of death; no want of courage to face suffering, but all pleasure in the soul. All is the legitimate result of a well-grounded reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ. We need not ask why this eager solicitude for the welfare of others—this strong anxiety that they might know and love the truths of the gospel. They had been precious to him, and he wished his friends to know their value. Christ was the foundation of his own hopes; and he knew that there was "none other name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved."

The sequel of his history may be told in few words. He had but just concluded the letter to his mother, sealed it, and placed it in his desk, when active preparations for the coming conflict commenced. His presentiments were verified. During the action, his head was struck by a ball from the batteries of the Algerines, and he was laid low in an instant. He was carried below: the surgeons examined him, but the vital spark was extinct. He had exchanged the roar of battle for the songs of heaven: he had forgotten the tumult of warfare in those peaceful regions where they learn the art of war no more.

Learn, then, dear reader, that eternity has no terrors for the soul that is in Christ. Consider how great and innumerable are the blessings connected with real religion; how it fills the soul with satisfaction and joy, to feel that sin is pardoned, and that all is safe for another world; and how it cheers life when, on good grounds, a man can apply to himself the blessings to which the Scripture invites, and say, "My maker is my friend; he will never leave me, nor forsake me: he has promised to bless me here, and will at last receive me to himself."

PUBLISHED BY THE SOUTH CAROLINA TRACT SOCIETY.

Printed by Evans & Cogswell, No. 3 Broad street, Charleston, S. C.

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5